

local development districts. In addition, the bill establishes an Inspector General for the commission.

Additionally, H.R. 3246 provides a framework for administration and management. The framework is modeled after the Appalachian Regional Commission structure, including membership, voting structure and staffing of the commission. Through the use of this common framework, this bill provides a consistency in distribution of economic development funds.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Maine (Mr. MICHAUD).

Mr. MICHAUD. Mr. Speaker, the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007 represents a vision for economic development in our Nation that will help Americans in the most distressed region of our country.

In the northern border region, we have seen a clear, persistent pattern of economic distress. If you look at the 36 counties that lie on the border right next to the border between Maine and New York, you will find poverty above the national level average, median household income that is more than \$6,500 below the national average. You'll see a persistent unemployment through layoffs and traditional manufacturing industry, and most striking of all, a meager gain in only 0.6 percent of the population between 1990 and 2000, compared to a 13 percent growth nationally over the same period.

In short, Mr. Speaker, our mills are closing, our young people are leaving and too many of our workers are looking for work. Clearly, this region has a common set of challenges and a compelling need for investment and new growth.

As a mill worker for over 28 years at Great Northern Paper Company, I understand the particular challenges in the border regions of Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont and New York. Like my father and grandfather before me, I left high school and went straight to work in the paper mill in my hometown. After 28 years, and 2 days after I was sworn into Congress, the mill that I worked at went bankrupt, and my hometown was devastated. Unemployment rose to over 33 percent.

The story of my hometown and the mills where I worked has been repeated throughout the State of Maine and our region. That is why we need to support this region economic development bill. We have to support our regional industries and build on new job opportunities, and that is why we need to invest in leadership and focus in our regional economic development that the Northern Border Commission would bring.

The Northern Border Commission would help the region invest in transportation, health care, agriculture, broadband and alternative energy. It can be a partner with businesses to maintain our industries and build new industry clusters. It can help us create jobs for the long term.

We have all the ingredients that we need to face our challenges head on and make our region an economic engine. This new commission would help us make a fundamental change in our future.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all my colleagues on both sides of the aisle for working in a bipartisan manner on this bill. I'd like to thank the Chair of the full committee, Chairman OBERSTAR, and the Chair of the subcommittee, Ms. NORTON, for their efforts as well, and also the former Chair of the subcommittee, Mr. SHUSTER, for all his hard work on the regional commission bills, as well as Congressman HODES from New Hampshire who has been a true leader in this particular area as well.

This bill represents a new way forward for economic development in our Nation for the places and the people that need it most. Let's pass this bill and give our people the hope and the future that they deserve.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from New Hampshire (Mr. HODES).

Mr. HODES. Mr. Speaker, I join Congressman MICHAUD in expressing thanks to Chairman OBERSTAR and other members of the Transportation Committee.

I rise today to urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support the Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act of 2007. This bill includes the Northern Border Regional Development Commission Act, the first bill I introduced as a Member of Congress, a bill with bipartisan support, and for which I extend a special thanks to Congressman MICHAUD, who has shown extraordinary leadership in the northern border region for economic development.

Mr. Speaker, parts of my home State of New Hampshire, and especially the beautiful region known as the North Country, have taken an economic beating and are struggling to recover. A staggering number of jobs have been lost. We have watched as plants closed and our young people disappeared to places that offer more opportunity. New Hampshire's North Country has suffered repeated economic body blows, and for the people who live there, it's getting harder and harder to get by.

I get up to the North Country quite frequently, and have spoken with hard-working folks with the drive to improve their neighborhoods, but whose communities have been ignored by the Federal Government for years.

If you were to pick up the paper today, Mr. Speaker, you would see pictures of the smokestacks of once thriving pulp mills coming down, having been subject to explosives.

Because of the challenges New Hampshire's North Country face, and the sincere desire of the people there to turn things around and to create new jobs

and new investments, there's a compelling case for leveraging Federal investment in the region. In fact, the northern border region, or the ice belt, which includes the northernmost counties of New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, has higher unemployment, a higher percentage of people living in poverty, and lower household income than the rest of the Nation.

The commission created in this bill would be charged with investing Federal resources for economic development and job creation in the most distressed counties in that northern border region.

By design and purpose, this bill follows the successful regional development models created in the mid 1960s to improve the economic standing of targeted regions in the South. Based on this successful model, the commission would create a unique Federal-State partnership charged with promoting development through regional planning, technical assistance and funding of projects aimed at encouraging economic prosperity.

The bill works like this: Community development districts and other non-profits are encouraged to bring project ideas to the commission from the local level. This bottom-up, grassroots approach insures that actions reflect both local needs and regional economic development goals. It also insures that States have a deciding voice in what investment is made within their borders.

With a proposed budget of \$40 million per year, the Northern Border Regional Development Commission can help meet a range of local needs. Whether the need is agricultural development, land and forestry conservation to maintain productive traditional uses, investment in transportation infrastructure, alternative and renewable energy or health care facilities, this commission will play a key role in investing in the region's economy.

The bill says, if you're willing to work hard and play by the rules, we're here to help you get ahead. The communities in the northern border region deserve effective government working for them. The Regional Economic and Infrastructure Development Act is an important first step toward providing good-paying jobs, economic opportunity and revitalized communities.

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, I want to stress the bipartisan nature of this bill. I also want to stress the hearings we've held on this bill. As you might imagine, when people hear the word "economic development," everybody wants in. This has been a very rigorous process. We have bent over backwards, frontwards and sideways to be completely objective and to be open to Members on both sides of the aisles.

It's worth noting that all of the amendments that were added were requested by minority Members, our Republican colleagues. We're pleased to